

Rep Mary Skinner  
State of the state response  
January, 9, 2007

Good evening from Olympia.

I'm Representative Mary Skinner, vice chair of the state House Republican Caucus.

Let me begin by saying how much I appreciate your interest in the workings of your state government.

If you're watching this evening, you've made a commitment to be engaged in an important process that will affect you and your quality of life.

When people take the time to be informed, it ensures accountability. So thank you for your awareness.

But tonight I want to challenge you to get a bit more involved. All I'm asking is that you pay close attention to the work of the Legislature, the governor and her administration as we address critical issues over the next four months and beyond.

Listen to what your leaders are saying. More importantly, watch what they do. Make sure their words match their actions and that their actions represent a genuine effort to address the needs of your family and your community.

In other words, hold each of us accountable.

As Republicans we have set high standards. Those standards will serve as the measure of our performance.

I'm going to share our Republican principles for effective legislative leadership, but first, let me be completely candid about one thing:

Democrats hold 60 percent majorities in both chambers of the Legislature. Working with a governor from their own party, it is within their power to pass – or defeat – virtually any piece of legislation they choose.

With that said, Republicans are not absolved of our responsibility. We will represent our constituents with passion. We can and will influence decisions -- with sound ideas and strong principles.

A year ago Republicans worked with constituents to gain support for important legislation -- stronger penalties against sex predators, historic legislation to better manage and deliver needed water in eastern Washington, and the elimination of park fees to name a few.

These were all Republican measures adopted in a Democrat-controlled Legislature.

Once again, armed with common-sense ideas for improving the lives of the people we serve, we intend to play a constructive role in the legislative process. (pause)

Republicans in the Legislature will act on principles embraced in a theme we have adopted for the coming year: We want the BEST for Washington:

B – E – S – T.

B is for balance between responsive and limited government.

We reject the idea that the answer to every problem is an expensive government program.

Your government should resist the inclination to assume power and interfere in the lives of those who simply want to earn a living, own a home and raise their families.

Our state government can cultivate opportunity without interfering unnecessarily in the day-to-day endeavors of free people.

We also know that every dollar government spends came from someone who earned it.

Republicans will meet the needs of citizens in the most effective and least intrusive manner.

We resolve to take care of our most vulnerable, and we will work to protect your families' freedoms. (pause)

E is for empowering people, and that begins with excellence in education.

Meeting high achievement and ensuring opportunity for our children depends on our commitment to excellence and high expectations in our schools.

We heard a lot tonight from the governor about education. 343 million dollars in new spending is her evidence of commitment to public schools.

This is simply more money into the same educational system that is struggling to keep kids in school and prepare them for a competitive job market.

Frankly, this is the same approach we've seen from Democrat governors for the past 22 years with disappointing results.

Our children and our schools are not well-served by a piecemeal approach that does not offer a vision of what a quality education looks like.

Success in our schools is not measured simply in dollars. It will be measured by our ability to help students meet higher standards of learning so they can compete in the global marketplace.

We remain confident in the ability of students, parents and educators to achieve excellence.

We refuse to surrender our future to the demands of special interests.

At the end of the day, all that matters is the success of our kids.

We are determined to empower schools and parents to prepare children for success.

We can help ensure their success by making sure they have job opportunities and a healthy economy in every corner of our state. (pause)

Under our “Best for Washington” agenda -- S stands for Strengthening Washington families.

Economic indicators reflect fairly strong economic growth in our state over the past year.

But prosperity is not measured by statistics alone. It is measured by the well-being of families.

The statistics don’t tell the story of communities like Grays Harbor that lost hundreds of jobs as a result of two mill closures in the last 13 months.

We are hopeful some jobs will be replaced by the development of a new biodiesel plant in that community.

We were encouraged by that news, but have since learned that the plant will import palm seed oil from overseas instead of relying on the resources of our own state’s agriculture community and the canola oil we are capable of supplying here.

We need an integrated economic development plan that ensures prosperity for ALL of Washington.

We must ensure that families have opportunities for employment.

Additionally, we need to protect their quality of life by creating affordable health care choices, protecting our natural resources and parks, and getting parents out of traffic and home with their children.

We must also keep our communities safe from the growing plagues of auto theft and methamphetamine production.

These crimes and others – such as domestic violence – are a by-product of economic hopelessness.

We need help for those communities that have not shared in our state’s economic growth.

We need to protect families from the threat of growing crimes that pollute our environment and threaten the safety of our neighborhoods.

And whether you live in the inner cities, the suburbs or our rural communities, we need to provide you with the tools that create prosperity, good schools, and safe streets.

Finally, T is for transparency and trust in government.

State government is cloaked in a culture of failure. The evidence is stark and disappointing:

Taxpayers were promised relief for our state's transportation system. The gas tax was increased by 14 and a half cents with a pledge from state government to complete a list of projects in communities throughout Washington.

When the last increase was put to voters, the governor said – and I quote -- “. . . we went out and showed them, in real, concrete terms, what a difference we were going to be able to make on their roads, in their home towns, in each community.” (pause)

Now, a year later, the governor says there are projects that won't be delivered as promised –one billion dollars in cost overruns are resulting in projects delayed, scaled back or cancelled altogether.

There has been no progress on the major projects that pose the greatest safety risks and contribute to the growing problem of congestion.

The governor recently passed on her responsibility to make a decision for replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct, delaying this project for months while costs go up by millions a day.

And to help cover the shortfall in transportation funding, we've learned that the governor has cut money from the budget that was earmarked to conduct performance audits of the state Department of Transportation.

This is not the time to undermine those efforts by stripping funding for performance audits that will help us determine whether we're managing our transportation dollars effectively.

We need that kind of accountability, now more than ever.

The state operating budget paints a similar picture.

The governor's recent budget proposal would turn a 1.9 billion dollar surplus into a 623 million dollar deficit in just four years.

With the rate of growth in her budget, the cost of state government is growing 5.7 million dollars MORE each day.

In other words, when you wake up tomorrow with your cup of coffee, the cost of state government will be 5.7 million dollars more expensive than it was today. (smile) That will be an expensive cup of coffee.

Spending will have increased 33 percent in just four years, and yet we would have no plan to help our students achieve an acceptable standard of proficiency in math . . .

We'll continue to have a backlog in funding for our pension system that will cost us hundreds of millions more over the long term. . . and we'll have no blue print for bringing down health care costs for families and employers. (pause)

Citizens don't trust a government that takes their property through heavy handed land-use regulations or the abuse of its powers of eminent domain.

They don't trust a government that raises their taxes and then repeatedly breaks the promises to deliver projects and services.

Republicans want state government to adhere to a simple concept: Let's keep our promises beginning with the one's we've already made.

We want to create a government worthy of the people's trust. (pause)

Once again this year, Republicans are calling for "truth in budgeting."

Our plan would reinstate a true constitutional spending limit that would prevent the double-digit spending growth we've seen from Democrat budgets the past two years.

Our plan would also require a 60 percent vote of the Legislature to raise taxes.

Truth in budgeting means eliminating the growing number of dedicated funds used for shifting money and disguising hundreds of millions of dollars in spending.

And we would propose a sunshine law that would give citizens a waiting period to review a budget before it can be passed into law.

No more drafting and voting on budgets in the dead of night.

We welcome the governor's support of our plan for a constitutional rain-day fund.

We believe it's a necessary and effective tool for protecting services and taxpayers in the event of a statewide emergency or a downturn in the economy.

And while she acknowledges the need for this type of savings account, her budget would drain our savings dry in just four years.

We are asking for a concerted effort to create a rainy-day account with a balance equal to five percent of the total budget.

Finally, we believe if education is the paramount duty of state government, then the budget should reflect the fact that it is our priority.

Republicans are calling for a plan we call “Fund Education First.”

Under our plan, the first dollar we spend would be on schools.

Lawmakers would not discuss spending a dollar on any other program until we are sure we have a responsible and thorough plan for delivering quality education.

We want to take the politics out of education . . .

No more putting kids in competition for funding with other state services . . .

And no more lawsuits pitting the state against local schools.

Let’s define what we mean by a quality education and fund it appropriately. (pause)

Republicans believe in common sense ideas that serve the best interests of families and communities.

We envision a government that belongs to the people and works to meet their needs where no other solutions exist.

Our “Best for Washington” agenda is a Republican road map for the coming year. It is the standard by which we should be held accountable.

There will be consensus among lawmakers of both parties in many areas. In others, there will be significant differences in our approaches and our philosophies.

I challenge you to take notice.

Inform yourself on the issues and the ideas proposed to address them – particularly where differences of opinion exist.

Therein lies your greatest opportunity to have a voice in the important decisions that are made.

Balance between responsive and limited government . . .

Empowering people . . .

Strengthening Washington families, and

Creating trust and transparency in government.

We look forward to working in a collaborative manner to do what's BEST for Washington.

Thank you, good night and God bless.

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